

Creative Editing in Documentary Film

Sandi Prasetyaningsih

Department Informatics Engineering, Politeknik Negeri Batam, Jln. Ahmad Yani, Batam, Indonesia

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Abstract: This study aims to describe the exploration of one of the solutions on technical issues that are encountered by the editor during the editing process. Practice-based research will be my methodology as an approach to assist investigate whether the creative editing can help the editor overcome the problems or not. My research will be running through the production of a documentary film and it will be followed by the method which would form the reflection to approach my case study in terms as editing in documentary. There will be an investigation of the basic editing technique like colour grading to support the creative editing process. This research is important since it gives another insight to the editor when they meet the same problems of documentary editing.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the film production, there are apparent differs treatments on editing between documentary and fiction film. (Reisz and Millar, 1977) argue that the documentary film objective is on an exposition of a theme meanwhile playing with a plot is the main concern of fiction film. This fact brings the editor to encounter immense challenge on employing their skill to create attractive story. Moreover, another main focus is when cutting the footage, documentary film is to more appreciates people and the event that filmmakers try to arrange (Crittenden, 1981). However, during the production, numerous issues might happen since documentary predominantly focused on particular events, characters, and social issues. It makes the filmmakers and the editor have a great constraint to work stick on the script during filming. As the result, the editor has to work creatively to construct an attractive content that can help them to deliver the story and message.

There are noticable time consumes needed in terms of editing documentary and fiction film. Fiction or feature film needs months of years to finish the editing; involve two or more editors or an editor and assistant. For instance, *Crimson Tide* (1995) spent 148 hours to edit 113 minutes film. On the contrary, documentary editing uses an immense amount of time. In film *Olympia* (1936), the editor required almost two-year to have the final version of the editing (Phillips, 2009).

According to (Orpen, 2009), there are no parame-

ter as the rules during documentary editing. The editor has several choices to explore their skill to do the editing. An interview section between an editor, namely Ken Sallow, and Jillian Holt, Ken highlighted his work experienced; he often worked in unscripted documentaries and allocated hundreds of hours to choose the proper footage. He decided on amount of creative works as he used cut out the extraneous material to do some repetitions and jump cut. Alongside the process, he tried to generate smooth cut by maintaining the continuity (Holt, 2015). Besides, according to (Cunningham, 2005), Geof Bartz, another editor, states that he used his experiences to edit the documentary; he pointed out the big challenge for the editor is to find out the dramatic story of the documentary subject since the documentary mostly talks about the real people.

To overcome several technical issues that occur during the production, the editor can employ their creativity to edit the documentary. According to (Byron, 2007), creativity has a relationship with inspiration, institution, ingenuity, imagination, and insight. The ability to create is the process of individual or team to get something that is new and has a probability to execute or proper to be implemented (Nemiro, 2004). In addition, creative activity is about any action, notion or product that alter a remaining domain or modify an existing domain to a novel one (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

On its implementation, as an argument from (Cunningham, 2005), editing is fully about the manipula-

tion; however the editor need to be concern on particular elements when working with creativity. It is necessary to convey the truth of documentary as much as possible based on the real story. Some ethical boundaries should be obeyed by the editor during the process. As an example, the documentary film is made by the actual story that really happen, so that the editor will not do the editing to something that did not happen.

Moreover, in the practical thing, creative editing enforce the editor to have a high sense of choosing the suitable materials for both visuals and audios. They should select the materials from hundreds of files. The proper visuals and audios element have a crucial role to convey the story and message of the documentary. Utilizing supplementary elements, such as music background and transition, also a part of creative editing to convey the emotion of the documentary subject.

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2 HISTORY OF EDITING

According to V. I Pudovkin, 'editing is the basic creative force, by the power of which the soulless photographs (the separate shots) are engineered into a living, cinematographic form' (Bordwell et al., 2017). (Orpen, 2009) highlights that editing is a process comprises three stages: choosing material with each length; collecting and timing the shots, scenes and sequences; incorporating with soundtrack.

Editing is a practice that include shots and other elements focus on establishing a story which fascinate the viewer through a cinematic form. Editing becomes a media for filmmakers to not only deliver the story, but also present an aesthetic film that bring the audience to feel the story in depth.

Editing's history is inseparable from the cinema growth as a consequence of the practice of editing that did not available before the beginning of filmmaking (Holt, 2015). Moreover, (Fairservice, 2001) also gives similar argument as the Holt; film editing theory cannot be thought about as separate from the historic evolvement of filmmaking since they are associate within the practice.

However, (Dancyger, 2007) states that editing did not exist when the earliest motion of pictures was made. In 1890s which the initial motion pictures commenced to begin, filmmakers stood the camera and filmed the story until the shot reel (a metal or plastic spool to hold film) of the film ran out. It is supported by early cinema methods, which applied the

film without any editing stage. The Kiss (1896) which is one of the well-known films in New York became an indication of film without editing on its shots. The film involved one shot which shows the frame of the screen kiss between two actors (Phillips, 2009).

The idea of editing last to the notion of experimental editing approach. Edwin S. Porter's film, *The Life of an American Fireman* (1902) and *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) tried to execute the cross-cutting technique which implies in two actions happening at two places at the same time and combines the one shot to other shots during the editing stage (Phillips, 2009).

Editing strategies are changing in line with the cinema development. The filmmaker attempted to explore the editing technique by applying the latest technology to find out the suitable technique that can be used in their film. (Reisz and Millar, 1977) compared the editing technique used by Porter and Griffith in their film. The main purpose why Porter used a cut between shots was usually because it was physically impossible to execute into a single shot. On the other hand, Griffith used the cut for dramatic reasons to present to the audience details of the scenes which becomes the height of the drama event at the specified moment.

The finding of editing technique in the early discovery of filmmaking arose as the principle of classical editing. Regardless of that time, continuity and dramatic construction were not the main objective of editing. Most of the initial films were taken as one shot.

3 EDITING TECHNIQUE: CONTINUITY IN FICTION AND DOCUMENTARY FILM

Continuity editing is an example of editing techniques that is commonly employed by the editor. (Smith, 2005) underlines that by driving viewer's across cuts, in terms of continuity editing, it can be seen as functional purposes. It means that editing gives several information about the transition and existing visual on film. According to the argument from (Smith, 2012), in terms of applying continuity in editing, natural attention signs can be utilized; these may involve conversational turns, off-screen sound, and pointing gesture to encourage the viewer's concertation through shift across the cuts.

Furthermore, continuity editing is utilized as the more by which the editor maintains the viewers' attention, avoiding them from becoming lost in the

story. Continuity should be presented smoothly to avoid the viewer from feeling unfocused through the transition of the story. Hence, the audience can get the narration every moment on the flow of the story.

(Frierson, 2018) reviews that continuity for the fiction film is approached by implying the mise en scene and cinematography that have a series of shots with discontinuous flow and creating continuous through cutting system. In addition, continuity can be executed on the time, place, action and in several ways, such as eye-line matches, action and reverse shot.

The eye-line matches are represented in the scene *Life is Beautiful* (1998) when the man on the bicycle looks off-screen to the left; the next shot shows what he is looking at. The continuity editing also can be accomplished by cutting on the action. In particular, a shot shows the end of the subject's movement and the next shot starts with a different angle or distance. In addition, reverse shots are usually used for conversation or dialogue shots to tell the reaction and emotion of each actor (Phillips, 2009).

By contrast, according to (Nichols, 2017), documentary with the continuity techniques tend to unnoticeable and has less priority due to the correlation between time and space; these are not as essential editing component, but because of the actual historical linkages. (Kriwaczek, 1997) points out that producing continuity cuts from a scene to others will prevent the viewer from having a slow comprehension of action in order to identify the novel concern of interest. The most important aspect of editing in documentary is to have the sense of the objective for the documentary itself (Hampe, 1997). This can be achieved by giving visuals that interesting to the audience and support the overall purpose through the evidence revealed by the visual.

(Hampe, 1997) investigates that there are various editing techniques that can be employed as communication way to the audience. Nevertheless, it is necessary to take into consideration some questions "Can you see what is happening in this documentary?" and "Does it make sense?". Hence, the editor can implement the editing technique wisely based on their main goal of the documentary film.

In addition, the editor of fiction film normally has script as guidance. It assists them to control the continuity among scenes, such as action and place. As they follow the script flow and select the right shot to support the story. However, a documentary film without script encounter the editor to maintain the continuity in editing by constructing the continuity itself in story and emotion of the subject. These elements can produce an attractive documentary if the editor use the

existing shots in creative ways.

4 METHODOLOGY

(Batty and Kerrigan, 2018) argue that screen production related to creative practice research enquiries can be signified numerous ways; practice-led research, practice-as-research, practice-based research, and research-led practice. (Candy and Ernest, 2018) states that novel media arts as one of the creative pieces emphasizes the creative process and the works that are generated; practice as well as research work together to produce new insight that can be distributed and analyzed. Based on this argument, my research will be practice-based. To support my methodology, I will use reflection as my method to approach my case study. The reflection method will become part of my learning process after analyzing the case study, employing this into my creative work, and lastly reflecting upon my creative practice. As such as, my reflective practice is 'intentional consideration of an experience in light of particular learning objectives' (Hatcher and Bringle, 1997).

I will be working on analysing a documentary case study from the Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts Awards (AACTA); Whiteley as the winner of Best Editing in a Documentary in 2017. I will look at the first three minutes of Whiteley and take note of how they approach creative editing throughout the editing process. The case study analysis will inform and enhance my creative practice. According to (Rowley, 2002), case study is widely used due to it offers various method of gaining insight that might not have been accomplished with other approaches; case study is also employed for developing more structured tools that are essential in investigations and experiments. In the end, after exploration in creative editing, I will reflect on which things work well and which do not during the post-production process. The reflection on the case study is part of my learning process in my creative piece. (Ghauri, 2004) says that 'a case study is both the process of learning about the case and the product of our learning'.

5 CASE STUDY

Whiteley is a documentary film about Australia's most iconic artist, Brett Whiteley, with duration of one hour and 35 minutes. This documentary uses a concept of 'in his own words' and visualizes Whiteley's story by using his notebooks, personal letters,

photographs, and other materials that support his concept (IMDb n.d).



Figure 1: The opening visual of Whiteley documentary film

In the first scene, this documentary reveals montage sequences of black and white, and colourful pictures (see figure 1) to introduce Whiteley, telling when and where he was born. According to Frierson, ‘montage in the broad sense describes a series of short shots that compress time, space, or narrative information, but it actually has several distinct meanings’ (2018, p. 206). Montage sequences can be used as one of the additional elements to assist the visual aesthetic. (Leibowich, 2019) supports the notion that montage can be utilized as a device for creating spatial and temporal correlations within a movie.



Figure 2: Black and white self-portrait of Whiteley

In addition, the process by which the editor chose the beautiful series of images can be appreciated since this component really fascinates me as a viewer. With the arrangement of Whiteley’s self-portrait and his amazing art artefact, this brings the viewer to feel more engaged in understanding his life story. The black and white concept showing his portrait differentiates the expressions and activities of Whiteley with his creative piece.

In terms of coloring, the editor employ the feature of color tone; exposure, contrast, highlight, and so forth to keep the color continuity and as the distinct of current and past moment.

6 CREATIVE PRACTICE IN DOCUMENTARY FILM

Having the freedom to explore my creative skills during editing of the documentary, I intended to experiment with the color grading since this part of editing becomes the serious technical issues.

My last project in documentary was an unscripted documentary. It forced me to work creatively on the issues occurred during the production process. It happened since I got an attractive and energetic subject, so the subject of documentary told random things, yet we gave some questions sequentially. In addition, another problem came into the camera setting which the camera person set up the camera in automatic mode. Hence, every time the subject moved, it affected the brightness and color differences between the shots. Moreover, the expression and emotion of the subject were out of my direct control.

For three minutes lengths of fine-cut documentary, I worked in two hours recorded video. As the initial process, I selected the proper content of the clips in order to construct the story. The attractive subject brought the beneficial to create an interesting story of his personal life. However, since he told the story in random way, as an editor, it was slightly difficult to cut the shots in right part and made it into smooth continuity when combining with other parts.



Figure 3: Original clip of telling the time he moved to suburb

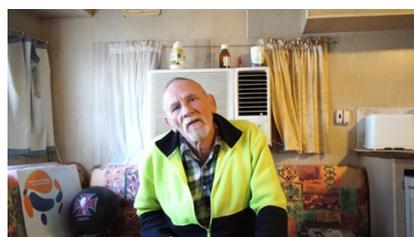


Figure 4: Original clip of his partner story

Figure 3, 4, and 5 were the original clips of the documentary film. It can be seen that each clip had different brightness and color grade. Figure 3 had overexposure lighting on the right side of the subject. Every time he moved, the brightness changed



Figure 5: Original clip of explaining about his house

and also affected other elements, such as shadow and contrast. Figure 4 was close to normal brightness and color grade, but the color contrast in the left side was a bit dark. Figure 5 got a lot of light in all areas of clips since the video taken outside and the color of the subject's cloth effect the white balance.

To overcome these several problems, I edited the clips by setting up the color grade on some components, such as temperature, tint, highlight, shadow, and so forth. However, the immense challenge of the color grade editing was to keep the color continuity for each shot. Hence, my main concern was to avoid the color jumping which could distract the audience's concentration while watching the documentary.

I tried to maintain the color continuity for figure 3 and figure 4 by putting the same values of the color grading. The color grading in figure 6 was applied to all indoor clips as the default color grade attribute values. I used the basic correction feature as my tool for color grading. I changed nothing for the white balance, but I played with tone's values to generate proper color. I adjusted the exposure attribute to -0,4 in order to reduce the amount of light. Furthermore, the contrast's value was decreased to -32,7. The bright spot value or highlights was changed to -27,4. In addition, to make similar dark part in each shot, I modified the value of shadows become 9,7. Whites attribute was set up to -6,2 and there was no correction value for blacks' attribute.

Figure 7 and figure 8 were the result of applying the color grade as shown in figure 6. The clips still had different brightness and color even they have similar attribute values. It happened because both of the clips had a big gap of overexposure.

Figure 9 was the default attribute values for outdoor clips which it was totally different attribute values compared with the indoor clips. I modified the exposure attribute to -2,8. The contrast's value was altered into lower value than the value for indoor clips; -65,8 was used to bring down the color difference between the light and dark color tone. Highlights and shadows were change to 64 and 20,7 respectively.

As it was stated, the color of the subject's cloth affects the white balance, so the color grade editing

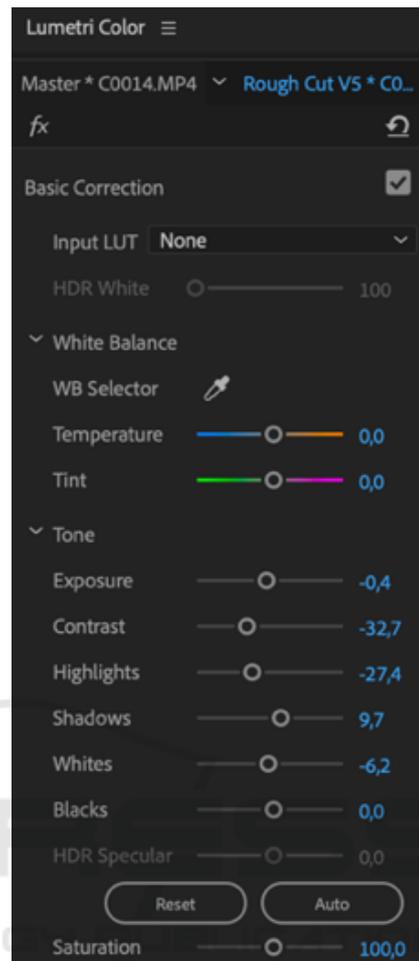


Figure 6: Color grading editing



Figure 7: Edited clip of telling the time he moved to suburb

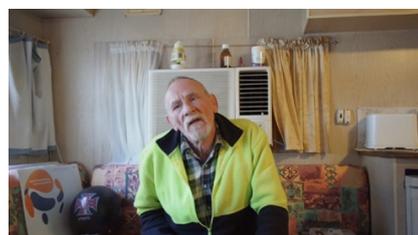


Figure 8: Edited clip of his partner story

was more focus on highlight to reduce the overexpose

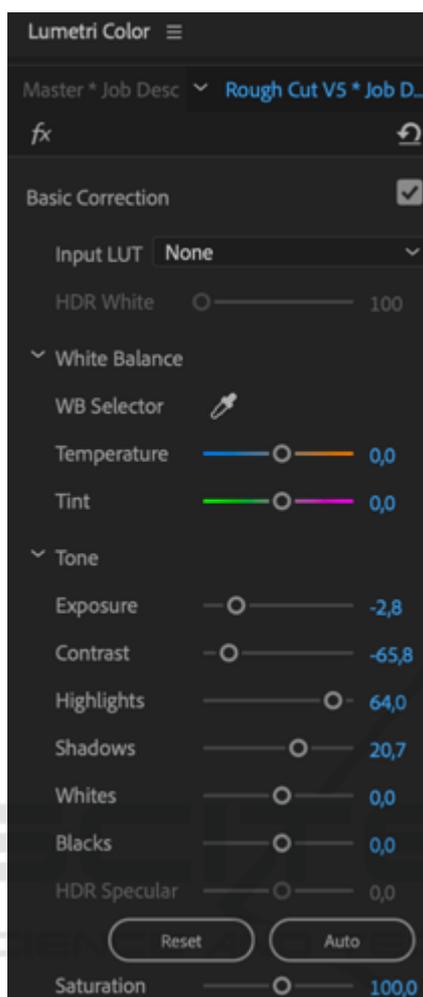


Figure 9: Color grade setting for outdoor clip



Figure 10: Edited clip of explaining about his house

lighting as the result at figure 10 by implementing the color grade set up as figure 9.

7 CONCLUSION

It is challenging to work in documentary film, especially when it enters the editing process. I realized that during the production, we need to have a well-design production plan as the preparation of any un-

predictable issues. Moreover, as the exploration of color grading feature by employing the color tone; exposure, contrast, highlight, and so forth, I learn a lot about how to keep the color continuity if I meet over exposures shots.

I know that my exploration on color grading in my previous documentary film is not fully successful. It is because the problems related to overexposure brings me to a difficult time since even though I implement the same color value, it still ruins the color continuity. Hence, there are still color differences, for example different highlight and contrast, between the shots. As the result, in terms of the issues that I face for this production, I try to edit the color continuity in visual as close as possible, so it is a bit reduce the color jumping and avoid the viewer from getting distraction during watching the documentary.

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